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SUBJECT: MEXICO'S PRI TALKS TOUGH ON SECURITY ISSUES

REF: MEXICO 02864

11. Summary. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) of late has ramped up criticism of President Felipe Calderon's handling of Mexico's security problems, probably in large part to rally support and to distinguish itself from Calderon's National Action Party (PAN) in the runup to the 2009 legislative and key gubernatorial elections. The September 15 Independence Day attack in Morelia, Michoacan State has only given the PRI more ammunition to use in an attempt to tarnish the administration's crime-fighting record. While PRI will have to carefully balance its goal of scoring legislative victories off Calderon with the Mexican public's clamor for more effective and efficient resolution of security matters, its efforts may still further complicate an already onerous legislative session. End Summary.

Tough Talk...

12. PRI in recent weeks has upped its criticism of the Calderon government's handling of Mexico's security situation and has engaged in some grandstanding on security-related budget items. During contentious question and answer sessions in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies on September 22 and 23 respectively, PRI officials lambasted Public Security (SSP) head Genaro Garcia Luna, Attorney General Eduardo Medina Mora, and Secretary of Government Juan Camilo Mourino for the administration's crime fighting measures. PRI senators walked out of Monday's session to protest what they claim was unwillingness on the part of the security officials to diverge from prepared talking points and address questions posed by opposition lawmakers. Moreover, despite a joint declaration signed by all three major parties--posted prominently on PRI's official website--calling for unity following the Morelia attacks, PRI leaders within days of the event censured the Calderon government's anti-crime efforts. PRI Senate coordinator Manlio Fabio Beltrones publicly questioned Calderon's ability to prevent a further deterioration of Mexico's security environment while Mexico City daily Reforma reported that PRI deputies met to discuss asking for the resignation of top security officials.

...And Some Action

14. The PRI is "moving aggressively on crime," PRI Deputy Emilio Gamboa, president of the Chamber's Political Coordination Board and head of the PRI faction in the Chamber told Polcouns on September 29, which will be reflected this

legislative session. PRI has demarcated several key areas in which it differs from Calderon's proposed security legislation and plans to submit its own counter-package this week. Gamboa noted that PRI principally objects to the creation of a "national police force," arguing that PRI wants better coordination among the various forces rather than a "superpolice" that would have a monopoly on law enforcement in the country. Staffers of PRI Deputy Marco Antonio Bernal told Poloffs on September 30 that the party also differs with the administration on granting police units the authority to seize assets from organized criminals prior to their conviction in court and with the mechanism for selecting the Attorney General (PGR). They said that the PRI wants to see a PGR more "autonomous" from the executive branch with an Attorney General and federal prosecutors nominated, approved, and subject to removal by the Senate rather than the president. PRI's security package also reportedly includes:

--The creation of a new institution that will coordinate obligatory exchange of information throughout national police files, including criminal files and police databases that include payroll information, fingerprints, vehicle registry, and weapons data. The institution would also look to improve coordination between federal, state, and local law enforcement entities and would be in charge of implementing public security policies;

--Increase in penalties for kidnapping and the elimination of the Attorney General's (PGR) discretionary prosecutorial powers, which currently allows it to pick and choose among organized crime cases it investigates or

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passes to other entities;

--Encouragement for participation in the National Security Council by local governments from border states;

--Definition and establishment of penalties for crimes related to child pornography and prostitution;

--A discussion of weapons trafficking and professional training for local police;

--Establishment of a nationwide salary for local and state police officials, particularly with the consideration that there are areas in which police officials make under 1000 pesos a month.

15. PRI also continues to quibble with Calderon over the proposed 2009 budget. PRI deputies have objected to both the size and the distribution of the proposed budget increase directed toward security measures (ref a). According to Gamboa, the PRI is not rankled so much by the decision to boost the security budget, but rather by the areas in which the administration is making cuts in order to reapportion them to security issues. Gamboa noted that the PRI is loathe to see Calderon pull funds from agricultural and educational programs while maintaining high levels of spending in programs the PRI sees as most useful for PAN electioneering.

Who's on Board, Who's Ready to Fight

16. PRI congressional contacts have suggested that they have PRD support on several of its proposals. Gamboa implied that PRD was amenable to much of the PRI's legislative package, and Bernal's staffers also noted that the PRD was open to the suggested changes to the PGR selection process. PRD Secretary for International Relations Saul Escobar told Poloff on September 30 that PRD has its own security package in the works featuring an approach geared more toward social issues rather than focusing exclusively on punishment. PRI congressional contacts have reiterated the same theme in various conversations with Poloff.

¶17. PAN Deputy Omeheira Lopez Reyna suggested PAN would need to pick its battles in the legislative debates ahead on security and the budget.

-- President Calderon had favored folding all local and state police forces into one federal force but had retreated in the face of apparent PRI threats to withdraw support for a consensus energy reform bill. Instead, PAN would seek Congressional backing for its long-discussed, more modest proposal to complete the merging of Federal Investigative Agency (AFI) officials into the Secretariat of Public Security (SSP), resulting in one federal police force.

-- PAN planned to resist PRI efforts to convert PGR into a more "autonomous" institution by acceding to the Senate the President's present authority to nominate and remove the Attorney General and federal prosecutors. Lopez conceded PRI may enjoy PRD support on this issue but noted that the government had successfully blocked the PRI's prior effort to include this measure in the judicial reform bill adopted in June and was prepared to fight this battle again as necessary.

-- Lopez stressed the importance Calderon attached to dedicating more resources to security forces, particularly at the federal level. PAN was less than impressed with the efficacy of local efforts to face security threats and noted that money had not spend down their current 2008 budgets. In the face of PRI's desire to allocate more resources to local forces, Lopez remarked that PAN would argue that funding for state governments track with concrete performance indices.

-- Lopez indicated that PAN was prepared to push back PRI efforts to curtail authorities PAN seeks to grant law enforcement officials that would facilitate legal efforts to seize the assets of criminal organizations. She thought that PAN could count on PRD support on this measure and signaled

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PAN would also be prepared to make a strong case for this with a general public short on sympathy about the "rights" of organized criminals.

Comment

¶18. PRI has opted to take advantage of what it sees as an opportune moment to challenge Calderon on his security approach. As the Mexican public clamors for more effective anti-crime efforts, however, PRI will have to walk a fine line in its efforts to score security points off Calderon if its machinations in congress complicate, obstruct, or delay the passage of key legislation. The Calderon administration nevertheless may find itself increasingly tied up by a feisty PRI legislative bloc looking to differentiate itself in the runup to the 2009 elections while still burnishing its law and order credentials.

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